

(Monroe Journeys - December 2020)

THE CRYSTAL, THE LABYRINTH, THE BELL AND THE TOWER

by Mary Trainor-Brigham

This vivid article was originally published under the title, "Synching and Swimming with Mythic Archetypes at the Monroe Institute," in the "TMI Focus," of Spring/Summer 2002. It is a personal story of awakening and transformation by Mary Trainor-Brigham.

Through Mary's narrative you are invited to walk her path of discovery—her deep Monroe inner experience—as well as her outer exploration of the rich archetypal environment of Monroe's physical campus. If you are feeling the strong pull to return bodily to the Monroe institute, we're right there with you! In the meantime, Mary offers a poignant reminder of its special resonance. We'll see you on the other side of COVID 19!

The crystal, the labyrinth, the bell, and the tower all sold me on the Monroe Institute—and I'm so glad they did.

Not that I wasn't already convinced that the Monroe experience afforded the world a much-needed means of initiating into vaster, deeper realms of consciousness. Not that I hadn't packed up lock, stock and barrel and moved from Maine to Virginia precisely to make Monroe's teacher training a focus. But the closer I got, the more apprehensive I became.

You see, I have a confession to make—I'm one of those wives who never would have come to Monroe, nay, never would have heard of Robert Monroe, if it hadn't been for my husband, Chris. And I'm not alone in this: in the March 2002 "Gateway Voyage," three other women admitted they'd been swept along into the program by the jet stream of their husbands' enthusiasm. Like a compact car coasting behind a semi, I'd listened for years as Chris quoted from one deeply-treasured Monroe book after another. And this from a man with a natural penchant for consciousness studies, having pursued them since spending a youthful decade in an ashram as a monk.

I, on the other hand, am cut from a more sensual, intuitive mold. When I decided to become a therapist, it had to be an art therapist, so all those phobias, complexes and thwarted talents could be painted, molded and carved into tangible form. When seeking an advanced degree with a spiritual bent, it had to be in culture and spirituality, then I could get my butt in the hut with native peoples expounding wisdom teachings that require monkey fur and feathers, drums and rattles, breath and sweat.

And yet, having since conducted cross-cultural workshops nationally and internationally, I noticed that the participants were mostly women. I had to bandy about some scientific theories—the latest quantum findings, for example—in order to make the men really

comfortable. Something was missing, and I became more and more convinced that that something had been wonderfully honed and polished by Monroe. I just knew that while there were countless men who wouldn't consider launching onto a shamanic voyage, they'd be just fine donning earphones and cruising off to all and sundry Focus levels.



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It was exactly that—the numbered Foci—that caused my resistance. After journeying with indigenous peoples to the Temple of the Moon, the Cave of Lost Children, the Land of the Dead, etc., my mind seized up at the prospect of Focus 10, 12, 15, 21, etc. I had fears of disappearing into an abstract realm, my poor body left behind in some cold techno unit while the more integrated “Gateway” participants shuffled down to lunch. Instead of embracing greater consciousness, my mind would be ravaged by an inhospitable stratosphere into an invisible chaos of shredded feathers ...

How wrong I was, thank goodness. And thank whoever it was who placed all those mini-constellations on the ceiling of my cozy and comfy (not cold and anesthetic) chamber.

Once accepted into the program, and having moved to Charlottesville, Chris and I were eager to obtain a sneak preview of the site. After driving through the comforting, ancient rolling hills, we were magnetically drawn by the labyrinth, the crystal, the bell and the tower of Monroe. Since strong Jungian training had marinated me in the richness of archetypal imagery, I seized upon these beautiful elements to anchor future voyages.

It still wasn't feeling easy, as can be said of any true initiatory enterprise. Gazing at the tower, which was mysteriously inspired by the architecture of Robert Monroe's ancestral family's landholdings, I let all my apprehension flood me. The traditional, patriarchal impact (not a great legacy in my past) was somewhat mitigated by the knowledge that Robert's daughter, Laurie, had assumed the Institute's presidency. While her father's presence suffused the atmosphere, I was curious—what of his spirit endured and what was evolving, now that his daughter was at the helm?



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Who of us is not strongly some father's daughter or some father's son, when it comes to Western cultural identity? And how would filtering all that acculturation through the lens of Monroe's simple dictum, "I am more than my physical body," play out? After all, the realms of

consciousness he explored and mapped out were usually jealously guarded by theological and psychological schools of thought, schools in which I'd earned graduate degrees.

As I pondered this, what came to mind was the medieval legend of St. Barbara, a father-daughter tale of a dark cast. What was this, myth surfacing at Monroe? I was beginning to appreciate that the austerity of Monroe's teaching was not a debilitating, enervating framework, but provided a tabula rasa upon which each individual's process could stand clear. In the tale, Barbara's mother is absent, having died years before. Her father is a formidable warrior who, when off on campaigns, locks his daughter in a tower. The man is powerful, successful, but of a brutish stripe, controlling, and a pagan.

Nonetheless, the daughter benefits in some regards from being locked up in the tower. The panoramic view of her father's property is magnificent and his tales of military strategy afford her a rare education in leadership. Once, during his absence, Barbara grows ill with ennui and sends a message down via a basket to her servants, requesting a doctor. A passing monk proclaims himself a "doctor of the soul" and is admitted into the tower. Once there, he converts Barbara to Christianity, carving out three windows in the tower to admit the light of the Holy Trinity.

When the father returns, he's incensed at the turn of events and tosses his daughter from the tower, presumably to her death. Miraculously, and with the buffering mercy of Mother Nature, Barbara survives, escapes into the forest, is rescued by an up-and-coming young king whom she marries, and ... ? You guessed it. They live happily ever after, even welcoming Barbara's chastened father as a guest to their prospering court.

The medieval woodcuts illustrating this legend are usually of two types: those depicting Barbara languishing in her father's glorious tower, and those showing her as a queen, caressing a small tower in her lap and smiling a Mona Lisa smile. It doesn't take a Freudian to see the phallic implications. She either serves her father's power or dies; once "dead" to the old paradigm, she is free to enjoy her husband's power or, as Jungians would see it, to shine from the light of her own inner spirit.



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where so many Monroe grads gather out-of-body for reunions.**

Like Barbara of the legend, any son or daughter of this culture arrives at Monroe's tower preformed by any number of indoctrinations. We arrive with what the philosopher Heidegger called a sense of "thrownness," which may or may not war with a sense of authenticity. But one thing is sure: greater authenticity is offered here.

It's easy to imagine the simple assertion, "I am more than my physical body," striking with the clarity of a lightning bolt into Byzantine systems of belief, or perhaps reinforcing the worthy ones but from the inside out. I wondered what of my past would be enhanced by the Hemi-Sync® experience and what would, well, sink. After mindfully walking the labyrinth and gratefully embracing the crystal, I was ready to find out.

Having now completed the "Gateway" program and eager to continue training, I have experienced two towers at the Monroe Institute: the literal tower of glass at the Nancy Penn Center, and the one emerging within as I open myself to the different Focus levels, bless 'em in their abstract purity.

Using the chakra system as metaphor (a metaphor used more commonly in Laurie Monroe's time than in Robert's) we can understand ourselves as rainbows of energy, from the red at the root of our torsos to the purple at the crown of our heads.

In our current popular culture, the emphasis is on the lower three chakras: physical grounding (root), sensual pleasure (abdomen) and personal power (solar plexus). Seldom are we encouraged to penetrate the threshold of the heart chakra into the deeper, vaster realms of the throat (communication), the third eye (resolution of duality) and crown (spirituality).

For those who have fostered mainly the first three chakras, the Monroe experience grows you, doubles your height, knocks you out of any limiting towers of prefabricated systems and hands you your own tower, just the right size, to ponder with a Mona Lisa smile of inscrutable pleasure. Or, if you prefer, the wisdom of the "hemi-Sphinx."

The plethora of waking dreams that revealed themselves to me during the "Gateway" program sometimes showed congruity with my previous, shamanic voyaging and at other times decidedly challenged and reconstituted my orientation to date. I was grateful for the afternoon outings, which allowed me to rewalk the labyrinth, itself a cross section of the chakra system, taking me from the physical outer bark to the spiritual inner core, igniting the mental, emotional and mystical properties along the way.

Being circular, it invokes the archetypal sense of wholeness, a balancing of above and below, yin and yang, and left and right hemispheres. The huge crystal at Monroe also grounded my navigations, even as it aspired to rare heights. In Jungian-speak, stones and crystals are symbolic of the enduring Soul, and it is that crystal which gave me a comforting promise of transformation.



... the outer tower of glass and the inner tower of illumination.

Our first visit to Monroe took place during a mild November afternoon, when an uncanny amber light bathed the hills. Somehow the setting sun cast my shadow into the surface of the stone, but shallowly, leaving the crystalline depths still shining, like the sun at my back. For a person such as myself, who has been scapegoated with the shadow of my natal family and has helped carry the dark side of numerous clients into the realm of transformation, this experience with the crystal was so relieving. I pledged that upon launching into the Monroe training, I would begin to live more boldly from my own inner light and not feel obliged to continue taking on others' shadows.

And then there's the bell on the veranda of the Penn Center, where so many Monroe grads gather out-of-body for reunions. Having not yet attained that level of astral-facility, I'm happy to think of the bell the way the Tibetans lamas do—as the instrument which sounds out the music associated with the heart chakra.

Between the height of the tower and the ground of the labyrinth rings out the yearning of our hearts to have our souls (the crystal) kneaded into enduring form. The yin and the yang, the heights and the depths, the skillfully-honed Monroe audio support exercises mold us into a more soulful balance. And, so it is. The journey continues.

My husband and I, while long interested in Monroe, felt an urgent mandate to come there after the twin towers of the World Trade Center collapsed on 9/11. Although I'd learned psychopomp, death-walking skills from shamans, I could only confidently help individuals I'd known cross over after dying. But Chris knew from reading Bruce Moen's books on "Lifeline" training that we could learn to help victims of such a tragedy, and who knew if more of such was not in store?

And so we've shifted our consciousness from the twin towers of NYC to the twin towers of TMI—the outer tower of glass and the inner tower of illumination. As a mentor of mine once averred, "Faith is fidelity to the insights you've gained." Monroe programs can afford you a wealth of insights if you're game to take the leap from your old structures of consciousness!